



Monday 10th February 2020

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well and that you're surviving the battering from storm Ciara. Thank heavens we moved the sheep yesterday as the river Swale has risen 9 feet in the last 6 hours. I'm sparing a thought for the animals of farmers who have no internet or mobile phone, so no alerts from the Environment Agency. Low-lying land in Richmond is in flood and all roads into the Dales are impassable. Thank heavens I didn't buy the house by the river and live very pleasantly on a hill.

Here are a few tasty recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Roasted Sweet Potatoes with Black Bean Chili

2 sweet potatoes	1 tbsp vegetable oil
1 onion, sliced	1 garlic clove, crushed
1 tsp ground cumin	1/2 tsp sweet smoked paprika
pinch cayenne pepper	pinch ground cinnamon
1 tbsp tomato purée	400g can black beans, drained and rinsed
handful mint leaves, shredded	

Preheat the oven to 200°C / Gas 6. Wash the sweet potatoes and pierce them all over with a fork, place on a baking tray and roast for 1 hour until tender. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Add the onion and fry for 5 minutes until soft, then add the garlic, spices and tomato purée and cook for 1 minute more. Tip in the beans, add 4-5 tbsp water and season. Fry for 2-3 minutes, until warmed through, adding a splash more water if it looks dry. Split open the potatoes, pile in the beans and scatter with mint. Serve perhaps with guacamole.

Hazelnut, Maple and Sweet Potato Brownies

1 large sweet potato, peeled and cubed	150g dark chocolate, chopped
50g coconut oil, melted	100ml maple syrup
2 Hen Nation eggs	100g ground hazelnuts or almonds
1/2 tsp baking powder	2 tbsp cocoa powder
1/2 tsp salt	1/2 tsp cinnamon

Put the sweet potato cubes in a saucepan of boiling water, then cook for around 10 minutes until tender. Drain well, mash until smooth, then set aside to cool. Preheat the oven to 160C /325F/ Gas 3. Put the chopped chocolate in a glass bowl over, but not in, a pan of simmering water, then gently melt. Take off the heat then stir the melted coconut oil and maple syrup into the chocolate. Stir the chocolate mixture into the sweet potato, add the eggs, then fold in the ground hazelnuts, baking powder, cocoa powder, salt and cinnamon. Spoon into the tin then bake for 30-35 minutes, until the brownie is crusted on the outside but still squidgy in the middle. Allow to cool, then cut into squares.

Leek and Mushroom Pasta Bake

750ml semi-skimmed organic milk	slice of onion
1 bay leaf	4 peppercorns
240g mushrooms, sliced	50g butter or margarine
40g plain flour	300g dried pasta shapes
2 tsp wholegrain mustard	1 tbsp oregano leaves
125g mozzarella ball, torn in pieces	25g organic Cheddar, grated

Put the milk, onion, bay leaf and peppercorns in a pan and bring to just under the boil. Set aside for 20 minutes to infuse. Finely chop the mushrooms. Meanwhile, melt butter or margarine in an oven-proof casserole over a low heat. Cook leeks for 20 minutes until softened. Remove with a slotted spoon and set aside. Turn up heat to medium, add the mushrooms and fry for 5min until golden. Strain the milk, discarding the onion, bay leaf and peppercorns. Return leeks to the mushroom pan with any juices. Sprinkle over flour. Cook for 2 minutes then, off the hob, gradually add the milk, stirring constantly, to make the sauce. Return to heat, stir until thickened then simmer for 2 minutes. Meanwhile cook the pasta according to the packet instructions then drain. Preheat grill to medium. Stir the pasta into the sauce with mushrooms, mustard and oregano. Check seasoning. Dot with the mozzarella and sprinkle with the Cheddar and grill for 4-5min until bubbling.

Swirling round in our consciousness with the gales, the coronavirus. The Sunday papers are full of it. It's times like this we realise how many British people are living across the world. They're everywhere. Who would have thought there would be so many in Wuhan, that place no-one had ever heard of. I don't know what they're all doing there but they're coming home now.....back to base. The Chinese takeaway at the bottom of my road is distinctly quiet. Apart from that, normal life continues.

I suppose most of us believe that one day the big one will come but don't know how, what or when. We are sort of waiting for it because as a species we know we deserve it. Myxomatosis keeps the rabbit populations in check. Ours is creeping ever closer with Avian flu, Sars and Swine flu and now this, the one with no name. Ebola gave us cold sweats, the thought of our organs dissolving and coming out through our nose. Nothing quite fired the imagination at school like the Bubonic plague. There are no great, fanged monsters who will sneak up on us, rip us to pieces and eat us as we sit peaceably nibbling a sandwich in the park. No, these are our predators, the viruses.

When is the right time to start panicking, I feel sure we are at the ready, the giant Tesco home delivery list being lightly pencilled in the brain – 20 tins of red kidney beans, rice, lots of rice, 20 tins of chopped tomatoes, better make that 30. I smugly have a box of face masks in the shed. Not acquired with any presentiment but for when a sheep needs to have its feet sprayed for foot rot. I know they don't work as I still get the taste of it in my mouth and up my nose, and I'm only watching...overseeing. Anyway, my useless masks are probably still worth a fortune with global stocks selling out everywhere. I think a few layers of scarves with different meshes would be just as effective.

But for now at least, and here at least, we are fine. Hopefully it will just waft away into the universe.

In this scintillating life where we know not what is around each corner, we are as always, and at least, in it together.

Kind wishes, Isobel